

Religious Tourism in the Diaspora: Orthodox Christian Monasteries in North America

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Religious tourism is flourishing in North America. There is a growing number of sacred sites in the U.S. and Canada that have been popularized by religious tourists. As Olsen (2016) notes, many of these sacred sites were founded by immigrant groups, seeking to recreate reinvent sacred sites they would visit in their homeland. This is especially true among the Orthodox Christian diaspora, where visiting monastic orders for prayer and spiritual reflection is a strong part of one's Orthodox identity. In addition, Orthodox monasteries have become popular visits with non-Orthodox Christian Americans and Canadians, who come for the serenity and peace that exists in these sacred sites (Krindatch, 2016).

In order to better understand the organization, management and consumption patterns of religious tourism in the North American Orthodox diaspora, I will conduct a comparative case study of Greek Orthodox monasteries. The two cases in particular are: St. Anthony's Monastery in Florence, AZ and the Holy Convent of The Theotokos in Dunlap, CA.

This comparative case study will allow me to pursue a "most similar systems" design, where the characteristics of the cases remain the same, with only one or two major differences. In this study, both sacred sites are Greek Orthodox and governed by the Metropolitan's office in San Francisco. The main variable of difference is gender, where the monastery consists of monks, the convent of nuns. I hypothesize that a difference in organization, management and consumption patterns exists between the two sites.

The parameters of this research project will include semi-structured interviews with the Abbot and Abbess, along with the monks and nuns of the monastery and convent, if available. Finally, I also plan to survey visitors to the monasteries themselves through an email mailing list provided to me by organizers of trips to both sacred sites.

Key Words : Orthodox, Diaspora, Tourism, Spiritual, Monastery

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